(b) if so, what is Government's reaction on each of the points made in the press report;

(c) what are the contributory factors to the likely increase in import bill and what measures are being taken or proposed to be taken to contain the import bill; and

(d) the reasons for the reported deficit in the Oil Pool Fund Account and in what manner this is sought to be bridged and by when?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) The import bill depends on the overall consumption, indigenous production and prices of crude oil and petroleum products prevailing in the international market.

(c) and (d) The contributory factors to the likely increase in import bill for the year 1996-97 are shortfall in indigenous crude production and increase in import prices of crude oil and petroleum products. In order to contain the import bill, measures are being taken to increase the refining capacity in the country by expansion of existing refineries in the public sector and setting up of refineries in joint sector and private sector to minimise the product imports. Import and parallel marketing of kerosene, LPG and LSHS in private sector has been allowed so as to improve the availability of these products. Steps are being taken to increase crude oil production in the country through application of improved technologies, better understanding of reservoir behaviour, development of new fields, additional development of existing fields and by inviting foreign and private capital in the upstream sector. Deficits have arisen in the pool account because the sales realisation from the products did not fully cover the costs incurred. The position of the oil pool account is being monitored on a continuous basis and remedial measures taken to contain the deficit.

तेल पूल खाता में आय-व्यय के अन्तर में वृद्धि

187. **श्री राम जेठमलानी: क्या प्रधान मंत्री** यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) क्या यह सच है कि वित्तीय वर्ष 1996-97 के दौरान तेल पूल खाता में आय-व्यय का अन्तर वर्ष के प्रारंभ में अनुमानित अंतर से बहुत अधिक होने की संभावना है;

(ख) यदि हां, तो वर्ष के प्रारंभ में आय-व्यय की अंतर राशि का अनुमान क्या था तथा नवीनतम अनुमान के अनुसार इस राशि के कितनी होने का अनुमान है;

(ग) क्या यह भी सच है कि इस अंतर में बढ़ोत्तरी का प्रमुख कारण पेट्रोलियम आयात की राशि में वृद्धि होना है; और

(घ) यदि हां, तो अब तक कुल कितनी कीमत के पेट्रोल का आयात होने की संभावना है और यह कीमत गत वर्ष की तुलना में कितनी अधिक है?

पेट्रोलियम और प्राकृतिक गैस मंत्रालय में राज्य मंत्री (श्री टी॰ आर॰ बालु): (क) से (घ): जी, हां। 31.3.96 की स्थिति के अनुसार तेल पूल खाते से तेल कंपनियों की संचयी बकाया राशि 5,700 करोड़ रुपए थी और 31.3.1997 तक इसके 15,500 करोड़ रुपए तक बढ़ जाने का अनुमान है। वर्ष 1995-96 के दौरान लगभग 7 बिलियन अमरीकी डालर के वास्तविक आयात बिल की तुलना में 1996-97 का आयात बिल लगभग 9.6 बिलियन अमरीकी डालर होने का अनुमान है।

Transportation cost of Natural Gas

188. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to refer to answer to Starred Question 395 given in the Rajya Sabha on August 29, 1996 and state:

(a) the principles on the basis of which transportation cost is added to the price of natural gas at the different centres of despatch; and

(b) whether any proposal is under consideration for equalising the cost of transportation for natural gas all over the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SH. T.R. BAALU): (a) The transportation charges payable to GAIL reimburse the operating cost and provide a 12% post-tax return on equity.

(b) No, Sir.

Foreign Equity Participation in Oil Production Sector

189. SHRI CHIMANBHAI HARIBHAI SHUKLA: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the policy regarding foreign equity